

# LE PEN VS MACRON: *BIS NON REPETITA*

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him out of duty have shrunk to a trickle. Anti-Macronism is on its way to being more powerful than a vote for Le Pen.

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One thing is certain: the line-up for the second round of the French presidential election is the same as in 2017, as Emmanuel Macron will face Marine Le Pen as he did five years ago, but it would be totally naïve to assume that the same scenario will happen again.

### **Impressions from the election results**

Here are the first lessons we can draw from this election. [The results unveiled on Sunday, April 10th](#), show two things. On the one hand, the solidity of Emmanuel Macron's voter base—an older, bourgeois, and settled electorate, which does not have to suffer the consequences of the most criticised policies of the incumbent president. These voters are already retired and were the main beneficiaries of the healthcare choices made by Macron during the pandemic. They are attached to public order and take a dim view of anyone who might disrupt it—like the [Gilets Jaunes](#), suspended nurses, or modest classes who can't get through the month. For most of them, their support is not a support of values, of identity, but a functional support—materialistic, one might say. [The over-65s are the only category of the population that put Macron in the lead](#).

On the other hand, the election proves the effectiveness of Marine Le Pen's campaign. Her qualification for the second round crowns five years of hard work—a long, unglamorous, and methodical effort to give credibility to her programme and refine her presidential posture. A work of immense success, since Marine Le Pen gained 2 million additional votes compared to 2017, and this, despite the presence of Éric Zemmour who came to encroach

on a part of her electorate.

Simplicity, persistence, but also proximity have guided her campaign. Rather than organising spectacular rallies bringing together thousands of activists, she preferred to travel to markets and small provincial towns, which were grateful to her. She came out on top in more than 20,000 towns (France has 36,000), more than any other candidate.

## Zemmour was a help more than a hindrance

The presence of Eric Zemmour in the race was both a handicap and an opportunity for the Rassemblement National candidate. A handicap, because he has been a constant competitor, attracting voters and cadres—notably with the wave of defections that has hit Marine Le Pen's party. But her final result shows that she didn't suffer much from this competition. It was also an opportunity, because Marine Le Pen undeniably benefited from fixation on Zemmour, who monopolised the attention of the media and provided a radical touchstone guaranteeing the normalisation of her speech. The effectiveness of her campaign has been praised in the French media, including by those who are less well disposed towards her, such as the journalist Jean-Michel Apathie, who is reputed to be one of her fiercest opponents.

<https://twitter.com/Qofficiel/status/1511781062011240458>

The lesson to be learned from Marine Le Pen's success, as opposed to Zemmour's mediocre performance, is that even in the age of digital reign, social media is not everything. The number of followers on Twitter or the number of views on YouTube videos can have a deceptive effect on a candidate's real hold on opinion and on the country. This was the main mistake made by Reconquête activists. Obsessed with the figures of their interactions on the web, fingertip masters of the mechanisms of digital virality, the party perhaps did not take enough time to be interested in people.

The obsession of Zemmour's supporters with scrutinising the variations of the [QOTMII application](#) is indicative of this flaw. They saw in the high percentages given to their candidate the proof of their success. But the application measured precisely the digital interactions, which were mostly composed of Zemmour activists. This programme therefore proved to be self-predictive for them, and they became locked in a virtual bubble. They wanted to run a campaign "à la Trump,"—forgetting that Zemmour is not Trump, and that France has little to do with the U.S. Against the mastery of social networks, traditional campaigns, which consist of shaking hands while buying leeks and apples on the market, still have a few good days ahead of them. And this is perhaps good news.

Other factors may explain Zemmour's score, which was far below the expectations of his camp. Anti-Macronism played a major role, encouraging many right-wing voters to switch to Marine Le Pen, potentially the only one capable of challenging Macron for the fateful 50% in the second round. The fear of seeing Jean-Luc Mélenchon reach the second round also may have contributed. As the percentages showed, the leader of France Insoumise came very close to facing Emmanuel Macron.

More fundamentally, [the editorialist Jacques de Guillebon of \*L'Incorrect\*](#) got it right, a few days before the election, when he described a form of laziness inherent to a certain conservative right which, as we say in French, has "sold the skin of the bear before having killed it" (*a vendu la peau de l'ours avant de l'avoir tué*). Reconquête thought it was succeeding but only spoke to itself, without ever really managing to win over the public.

*This right-wing movement has completely forgotten its people. It has not proposed anything to this people so far from itself, nothing but to rid it of the scum and the Islamists, a healthy idea but oh so incomplete. What cultural policy for this right-wing wants to be "cultural"? None at all. What foreign policy when Russia attacks, for this "Gaullist" and "Schmitian" right? None at all. What health policy? Once again, none.*

The diagnosis is scathing, but somewhat true. Some will certainly pay the price of this clumsy commitment, such as Marion Maréchal who will have associated her image with a candidate who remained below the 8% mark—while having strongly affirmed that he was "the best placed."

## Macron's plan of action

For his part, Emmanuel Macron did not campaign. He did not need to. He was praised by the so-called "boomers," the very people who lauded his vaccination policy and his management of the pandemic, who are already retired and who will therefore have no problem voting for a retirement at the age of 65.

Since the announcement of the results, he will deploy all his forces, which he had held in reserve. For the moment, the feedback from his first trips is not to his advantage. In Denain, in the north of France, on the land of Marine Le Pen—she often polls more than 40% there—he tried to explain that his desire to "piss off the French" was actually a step "full of affection," before explaining to his interlocutors—solid French people from the north, hard-working and well-built—that they did not know "the real life." The seduction operation had difficulty in achieving its objective.

<https://twitter.com/BFMTV/status/1513503407918792710>

The game is far from won for Macron. In 2017, he had a lot of carry-over votes. This will not be the case in 2022, because the electorate is fractured into three camps, all of which have passed the 20% mark and are very difficult to reconcile.

In 2017, Macron could count on the votes of centre-right candidate François Fillon for Les Républicains. This time, his heir, Valérie Pécresse, is at the bottom—less than 5%. Those among the Républicains voters who wanted to support Macron have already voted for him in the first round. The small remaining points in Les Républicains are in all likelihood an

electorate that wants a right-wing policy but did not dare to go as far as Zemmour or Le Pen. Not all of them will go to Macron. The left was unanimous in giving its support to Macron for the second round, but it counts for little. What are the 1.8% of the socialist Anne Hidalgo, or the 2.3% of the communist Fabien Roussel worth in the battle?

## Quandary for Mélenchon's supporters

Jean-Luc Mélenchon is therefore the referee of the election. We must also salute his remarkable electoral performance. He conducted a very successful campaign, allowing him to gather left-wing voters a little disoriented by the bankruptcy of the Socialist party, and by skillfully playing on the theme of ecology to attract the Greens. He also benefited from [a very powerful community vote](#). He gained support through official voting instructions from Muslim authorities—who did not hesitate to tell believers who to vote for.

[https://twitter.com/\\_HaniRamadan/status/1512798899727175683?s=20&t=b3RyDN9kd-pWMSrvo4XaRA](https://twitter.com/_HaniRamadan/status/1512798899727175683?s=20&t=b3RyDN9kd-pWMSrvo4XaRA)

Local results favouring Mélenchon were extremely telling: in the north-east of Paris, for example, where the share of non-European immigrant population is very high. Some suburban towns have, for the same reasons, collectively turned their support towards La France Insoumise. The emblematic town of Roubaix, which was singled out a few weeks ago as one of the towns most contaminated by militant Islamism, gave 52% of its votes to Jean-Luc Mélenchon. It is the first time that a community vote appeared so clearly in the ballot box. It serves as a portent for the future, because these circles have for the first time shown a formidable capacity for mobilisation.

On the evening of the first round, Jean-Luc Mélenchon chanted his slogan four times: "Not a single vote for Marine Le Pen." But he did not say "vote Macron." He is far too intelligent and cunning not to sense that this is not going to be self-evident. Anti-Macronism is deeply

rooted among his militants. The introduction of retirement at 65 years old does not pass. Many of them still remember the Gilets Jaunes or the suspensions of non-vaccinated caregivers. For many La France Insoumise activists, putting a Macron ballot in the box is a morally untenable idea. Social networks are teeming with endless discussions in the ranks of Jean-Luc Mélenchon's activists. The hesitation is between abstention, or voting RN.

For them, voting Macron is not an option. The journalist Alexis Poulin, close to the France Insoumise, has thus proposed on Twitter a poll with revealing results. Out of just over 66,000 voters, 61% said they would vote for Marine Le Pen; 30% are in favour of abstention or a blank vote. Only 7% will vote for Macron. This poll is not scientifically reliable, but it is indicative of a trend.

[https://twitter.com/Poulin2012/status/1513397578523623424?t=Rxx\\_6CkE2Zv2vakODCn0gg&s=19](https://twitter.com/Poulin2012/status/1513397578523623424?t=Rxx_6CkE2Zv2vakODCn0gg&s=19)

Abstention in the second round in 2017 was powerful. This time, it will wreak havoc, especially in the ranks of La France Insoumise. Those who are convinced of Macronism have already shown themselves in the first round. Those who will vote for him out of duty have shrunk to a trickle. Anti-Macronism is on its way to being more powerful than anti-Lepenism. It remains to be seen how it will translate into the ballot box.

## Prospects for the second round

What advantage does Marine Le Pen have? She can count on the transfers of Éric Zemmour and Nicolas Dupont-Aignan. The hostility of some Zemmourist militants is real, but the majority of them will side with Marine Le Pen when the time comes. No government agreement is envisaged—and strategically, Marine Le Pen has no interest in it. We can be saddened by this, but we have to think about the overall strategy. Her challenge is to bring people together. The vast majority of Zemmour's voters are already committed to her—but they are, nevertheless, not more than 7%.

She needs to convince more people, and the media—more than ever before—will unfold their plan of attack and their methodical pounding to discredit her. They have already started. The left-wing weekly *Le Nouvel Observateur* explained that on her official poster, Marine Le Pen winked at the Ku-Klux-Klan through a hand gesture, in a photograph showing her right hand resting on a dresser:

<https://twitter.com/versac/status/1513785499697258496>

All avenues of attack are fair game, even the craziest.

The media and Macronists will unscrupulously "lump together" Marine Le Pen and Zemmour as "extremist." They will hammer untruths, and in particular make Marine Le Pen a Putin supporter. On that subject, she has time and again defended herself against such affiliation. The argument that Putin financed her campaign is specious: she was not supported by the Russian government, but by a private bank, which has since gone bankrupt and been bought by a Czech bank. Moreover, the loan was intended to cover the party's operating costs, not to finance her campaign. Finally, the loan was granted at a very high rate, indicating the absence of a "favour."

In the political arena, she can remind voters that Macron was the first, in the beginning of his five-year term, [to attempt a policy of rapprochement with Russia](#). He has been sufficiently criticised for this. But the campaign blitz in the final stretch is hardly open to reasoned arguments. Will the message get through?

In French political history, an incumbent president has never been re-elected, except in the case where his previous term ended with a cohabitation—that is, a legislative majority and a prime minister from the opposite camp. Will Emmanuel Macron break this rule? All bets are off.